

**Hawaii Pacific Gerontological Society  
13<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference Plenary Session  
“The Age Wave and the Demand for Paraprofessional Workers:  
How the State is Addressing the Future Today”  
Radisson Waikiki  
Prince Kuhio Hotel  
Friday, October 8, 2004**

**Remarks by Colleen Y. LaClair, Deputy Director**

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**Aloha! On behalf of Director Nelson Befitel, I would like to thank you for inviting the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to speak to you this morning.**

**Many of us here find ourselves in a period of our lives where we have become responsible for the care of our parents, or, anticipate facing the need to care for a family member in the future. And, I think all of us share a common concern about who will care for us when we become older.**

**Demographic factors are a driving force behind the growth of the health care industry. People in need of both temporary and long-term care are a diverse and growing population.**

**By far, those most in need of care services in the coming years will be the elderly. In the United States, the aging “baby boomer generation” will be the most significant factor for the increased demand for care workers. The growth in the number of elderly in the U.S. in need of such care will more than double from about 8 million today, to 19 million by the year 2050.**

**Factors contributing to this growing need include the decline in mortality rates; medical and technological advances that have significantly improved treatments of illnesses, diseases and injuries and extended life; and older persons living alone, rather than with family members.**

**People with disabilities and chronic illnesses include individuals with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, persons with mental retardation and**

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related conditions, and those with serious mental illness or problems of substance abuse.

The Supreme Court’s 1999 decision in *Olmstead vs. L.C.* has a profound impact in the way care services must be provided to the mentally disabled. The Court construed Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act to require states to place qualified individuals with mental disabilities in community settings rather than institutions, whenever treatment professionals determine that such placement is appropriate; the affected person is not opposed to such a placement and the state can reasonably accommodate the placement; and consideration of the resources available to the state are balanced with the needs of others with disabilities.

In the wake of the *Olmstead* decision, states are facing growing pressures to expand services for the mentally disabled in a variety of settings that provide a range of choices.

The breadth of the population to whom this Act may apply is still uncertain. More data is needed to understand and thereby help those with mental disabilities, the settings in which they currently are receiving services, and the extent of the services they require.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that paraprofessional long-term care workers represent approximately 72 percent of direct care workers in the U.S. These workers include: certified nursing assistants, nurses’ aides, orderlies, personal and home care workers, attendants, and aides.

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**Paraprofessional staff provides assistance with bathing, dressing, eating, meal preparation, house cleaning, and medication management and work in a variety of settings such as nursing homes, assisted living, adult day care, group and private homes.**

**Studies have shown several factors that constrain the supply of these paraprofessional workers, or, contribute to high turnover.**

**The lack of competitive and adequate wages is one of the most cited reasons for high turnover among nurses' aides, orderlies, and attendants. Also, the median wage for this group of workers in the year 2000 was \$8.89 per hour. These employees also face strenuous physical demands and high injury rates from working in nursing homes, as compared to other health and non-health related industries.**

**Staffing levels of certified nursing assistants are inadequate to accommodate the demanding workload in nursing homes. Employer-sponsored benefits may not be offered, or if it is, may be unaffordable.**

**Limited training has also been an issue and contributes to concerns that workers are not being properly prepared for the actual stresses of the job, such as working with residents who have cognitive impairments and/or behavioral health issues. In addition, workers in these areas have minimal opportunities for career advancement and upgrading their skills.**

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**In a report to Congress jointly prepared by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Labor, ensuring an adequate number of caregivers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will require addressing four key issues:**

**First, we need to find new sources of workers. Avoiding shortages in these occupations will depend not only on retaining current workers but also increasing the overall supply. Preparing for adequate numbers of faculty to train these potential long-term care workers must also be a priority.**

**The next key issue is the initial and continued training of workers. Effective post-secondary education and on-the-job training of long-term care workers is essential to equip them with the necessary skills required for this type of work.**

**The third key issue involves improvements in the working conditions for paraprofessional work. Common complaints include long hours, high case loads, burdensome paperwork, lack of respect, and potential dangers to their own health and safety. Improving these types of conditions will certainly help with retention of workers in long-term care settings and also dispel the unattractive image these types of occupations have.**

**The fourth key issue concerns compensation, benefits and the possibility of advancement. Wages for Registered Nurses and Certified Nursing Assistants in long-term care settings are appreciably lower than they are in hospitals. In addition, many workers lack health insurance, access to employee assistance**

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programs, pension coverage, and child care benefits. And, as stated previously, these positions usually lack career ladders and opportunities for advancement.

The same report to Congress also provided recommendations to address these issues which the State is actively pursuing and considering.

The use of business partnerships, an activity that the U.S. Department of Labor strongly supports, entails consortiums of employers, employees, educators, training providers, workforce investment systems and public agencies.

By partnering with various groups to address issues on wages, benefits, skills development, working conditions and career advancement, we can leverage funds, resources, expertise and knowledge for training, education and outreach programs.

We are examining ways to broaden the supply of frontline long-term care workers by reaching out to older workers, former TANF recipients, military personnel transitioning to civilian life, individuals with recent experience providing care to family members, displaced workers from other industries, immigrants and younger individuals.

We are working on opportunities to partner more with faith and community-based organizations in recruiting volunteers for respite care for family members, “backup” services, and home-based support.

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**Integrating technology in recruitment, education, record keeping, and patient care and monitoring, is vital and also necessary to increase marketing efforts that promote on-line job banks, web-based information sources and distance learning.**

**Our One-Stop Career Centers must be promoted more as they have the capabilities to effectively enhance a jobseeker’s awareness of the full range of long-term care occupations and training requirements, and benefits available to workers such as Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credits, and child care.**

**The Nurse Reinvestment Act which was recently passed, provides a good foundation for workforce systems, education and training providers, employers and industry representatives to look at strategic ways to address the demand for paraprofessional workers. The Act encourages:**

- > Professional schools of nursing to support undergraduate curriculum development around long-term care and geriatrics;**
- > Registered apprenticeship programs for paraprofessional occupations, building on the U.S. Department of Labor’s current pilot project; and**
- > Expanding English-as-a-Second Language training to long-term care workers to increase their effectiveness as well as job satisfaction and success.**

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**We need to increase focus on educating both employers and employees on worker safety and health in the paraprofessional field and continue to support research and evaluation activities that will help to inform policy makers at all levels of government, on wage and benefits trends for long-term care workers.**

**In closing, I would like to reiterate that these ideas and activities are guided by our recognition that the key players in meeting this challenge must include employers, workers, industry representatives, education and training institutions, workforce investment systems, community-based organizations, public agencies, and federal and state elected officials and legislators. In other words, a true public and private sector partnership.**

**The Department of Labor is committed to working with the community to take on this challenge to help improve the quality of life for Hawaii’s citizens and especially, the paraprofessional workers.**

**Mahalo and enjoy the rest of your conference.**